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THE SCHOOL AND THE LIBRARY

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Many of the things I shall have to say will, no doubt, seem trite. There is so much about books and their uses which has become proverbial! But even old truth and ancient theory may become newly useful when applied to new situations. We have a new situation here. We, as a large city school, are unique in that we bring the public library to the pupil instead of sending the pupil to the public library, and the thousands of high schools for which this is not possible look upon us with envy and expectancy. Theoretically a school with such facilities for training ought to produce "students" where others boast merely of "pupils." But are we, in fact, reaping the expected benefits? Is the mental product of our English classes recognizably superior on account of our peculiar situation? Or is the library an untried tool, strange and unfamiliar in our hands?

If we are to use it to the best advantage, it is necessary that we decide upon the ultimate objective of its use. There are two methods of reading: intensive and extensive. The classroom is undoubtedly the field for intensive reading, but the field of literature is so large that the pupil will find it immensely to his advantage to acquire the ability to read rapidly and much. If his knowledge is to be broad and representative, this is necessary, and if he is to avoid the wasting of much time on books of little or no value, this is necessary. One who is familiar with the ways of books is able to determine the relative importance of a book by a very brief perusal. Now, it is not our purpose to make "sketchers" or "book nibblers" of our pupils. None knows better than we, or deplures more than we, the slipshod, "tasty-hasty," high-school-boy-and-girl way of doing things; but a quickness of mental grasp, a readiness of judgment regarding literary values, and an aplomb

that springs from knowledge and experience in the world of books are highly desirable.

The reading of one book or one article now and then in the library reading-room during a study-period, because the article or book has been assigned and a test is expected on it the next day, does not and cannot develop this trait of self-assurance in dealing with the values of books. There is a possibility and even a probability that the pupil's reaction in such a case will be one of antagonism. If one is compelled to look at *red* for a certain length of time, the eye will with a feeling of relief seek another color at the first opportunity. The development of unbiased judgment of books depends, not upon rigid exaction, but upon more or less elastic choice of reading-matter.

Speaking from personal experience, I have no hesitancy in saying that some of my most valuable training (especially from the standpoint of English) was received during the hours I spent in getting acquainted with the library. To learn to feel at home among books, to take them down and turn their pages, to look their neighbors in the face (or in the back), to learn the names of the magazines on the racks, to know how to find a book on the French Revolution, or an article on submarines, or the latest monstrosity in fiction, is in itself a part of an education.

I do not mean to say that I am a disbeliever in system. I recognize the necessity of regulation. But I believe that over-regulation is worse than none. Admitting the correctness of the view that the ultimate objective of library work is to train in extensive and not intensive methods of reading, I wish to show that the system which now obtains here and in many other places where the high school and public library are co-operative is one that handicaps the efforts to realize this ideal. I am aware of the fact that I am open to the charge of having thus far indulged in many generalities, but when applied to the situation as it actually exists I hope that even the generalities may become illuminating.

The library permit which the teacher issues to the pupil must bear the name of the book to be read. This is a virtual library prohibition for such pupils as may have no reference assignments to do. Oftentimes the assignment is only a few pages in length,

and if the rule is rigorously carried out, the pupil must not take from the shelf some book of his choice to read for the remainder of the hour. Furthermore, it is not always possible for the pupil to obtain the book indicated upon the library slip. In such a case he may as well return to the study hall and pore over his text, or dream about the next holiday, or write a letter under the pretext of doing an English assignment. Why should we maintain libraries for our school children and then say to them, "This storehouse of knowledge, information, and entertainment is yours, but we can't let you in. Most of it isn't good for you, but here is a tough little article on which to cut your teeth. Chew it for an hour."

A second great defect in the system we labor under is that no opportunity is given the pupil to familiarize himself with the library as one big organization. He is lost. He doesn't know where the books which he wants are. Often he doesn't know where the catalogue case is. He wouldn't know what to do if he were led to it. In a great many places the English classes are taken to the library (one class at a time), and the librarian in conjunction with the teacher gives a lesson in library organization; the mysteries of the card catalogue are explained and the pupils learn how to find things.

Some practical suggestions concerning the classroom utilization of library reading may not be amiss. Do not hold over the heads of the pupils some impending or imaginary test on the reading. Let the work be as spontaneous as possible. Incidental questions during the recitation will elicit the information as to whether or not the references have been consulted. An occasional oral report and informal discussion on outside reading will bring before the class the value of doing reference work. Finally, and this is most important of all in my opinion, announce the topic upon which you wish reference work done and assign to the pupil the task of finding the references. This will bring him in contact with a large body of literature which he himself will have discovered. He will be impressed with the importance of a subject about which so many authors have written, and he will be brought face to face with the problem of operating the machinery of the library.

A further service the teacher can perform in the classroom is in the nature of seed planting. We do not know what fields in the minds of our pupils are waiting to be cultivated. Why should the teacher not select from the library good examples of various types of literature and bring them to the class? Read and review certain selections. Encourage spontaneous individual reading. Try to learn what each pupil responds to most readily and take advantage of the first signs of appreciation. The interest thus inspired in any one line of reading may indeed be seed worth planting.

One point I have omitted from this discussion thus far: the relation of library fiction and magazine literature to the course in English. I anticipate some disagreement on this question. It is easy to go to extremes. Here is a teacher who *requires* the *Cosmopolitan*; there is a teacher who permits the reading of no fiction less than fifty years old. Perhaps a few statistics would be interesting. At least 40 per cent of the books in the central public library and the branch libraries are fiction, about 25 per cent history, 15 per cent sociology and kindred subjects, 10 per cent science, and 10 per cent miscellaneous. The fact that about three-fourths of the books taken from the library by high-school pupils are books of fiction adds greatly to the importance of our question, What about magazines and fiction in the high-school library?

The significant thing about the list of fiction books read during the year by the Sophomore in high school is that it seems to be an absolutely indiscriminate selection. Flashy binding, title in gold, attractive frontispiece, etc.—that is enough to insure its being read by scores! Fiction reading can't be stopped—even if it were advisable. It is clearly the duty of the English department to take advantage of the *story instinct* and, instead of attempting to smother it, to attempt to train it. It is surprising to see how readily pupils will respond to the analysis of a story to discover what it is that makes it good or inferior. Very gradually a standard of excellence is established, and the pupil has begun the formation of the habit of discrimination—one of the greatest assets in life. The same can be said of magazine literature. Magazines are going to be read. Shall we allow the pupil to blunder blindly through some of the cheapest output of the press without ever

perceiving the poison on the pages? Or shall we show him that magazines, like people, are combinations of good and bad, and wisely direct him to certain periodicals of higher standard and to certain authors of greater ability whose articles are really commendable? I am at present attempting in a Junior class to set up a standard for the evaluation of periodical literature. I was surprised at the apparent inability of the pupils to distinguish between hurtful and helpful material in periodicals. I believe that I have done nothing of more practical value this year than the critical analysis of newspapers and periodicals in an effort to guide the pupils' daily reading.

I felt called upon to emphasize this point because no discussion of the utilization of the library would be complete without it. And I hope that it will be recognized as a protest against the regulation which here, and in many other places, practically makes one-half of the contents of our library (magazines and fiction) "taboo" to the average pupil.

To conclude, then, I shall say that we as teachers by encouraging extensive reading, by providing for latitude of choice, by acquainting the pupil with the magnitude and machinery of a library, by careful guidance and suggestion, can build up in the pupil's mind a worthy standard of judgment, broaden his outlook upon the field of thought and letters, and develop the invaluable habit of discrimination.